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Make Your Books. Then Eat Them.

Their pictures are framed in toothy edges. Crude slices that sever grandpa’s hand from raised arm, his fingers in some other world dancing in a wave. In one sepia photo, a touch of color crimsons grandma’s rouge-hating cheeks, her piled-high beehive squared by the photographer’s too-quick cut. The volumes of the dead are not contained by their crooked borders. They form tiny hemorrhages, dilating memory pools that suture together. They fill blind spots. They become complete as image writes over image. When grandpa’s hand becomes a fist of resistance and grandma’s hussied hollows and flattop announce her an early fashionista, an innovator of neon asymmetry, the pictures swell, breathe; each inspiration eclipses, each expiration reveals. And they live.
Charon Gets Tired of Questions

Charon had it made ferrying shades,
a coin for a boat to eternity.
A silent ride and silent row
row row row across Styx, Lethe, Acheron.
Placid comfort for him—passengers
with no thought, no speech, no memory.

Until the golden bough of the Sybil glistened
in fleshly living arms and this comforting row
row row row could be contested by jabbering man.
Charon, a modern mortician born
on the waves of jabber jibber jabberness.

Could Charon respond with more than row
row row row? A lubricating hack
unsnapping chords and rosining strings.
And if he could, would he say more than,
"I take the dead from the living world
to the world that is not living for a fee."
Porti-boy Love

Today my hand
is your heart.
Moist tissue ironed,
arteries compressed—
released. It pushes
sluggish brown blood
up and out in strings, viscous
chicken fats fall, flat platelets ding
on metal, overflow
spatters.

The machine,
pumps, a tick, a-
live rpm, draws
sewage from faint green
lines.
Femoral, aorta, pulmonary,
vena cava, subclavian, external jugular.
Black droplets under fluorescent glare.
wormy, oiled, thick.

This body, lambent, lanolized. Painted
pinky hue. Waiting
for kisses on stitched sleeping lips. Pasted
eyes, hidden milky clouds.

You touch me, stiff fingers caught
in velvet vest.
Detangled, I shake your hand,
Position your limbs, say
You're quite welcome.
No Suspects Named

Mother made her
lilac taffeta gown:
lightest purple bruise.
Passion culled, now sewn in
silky shine. “How could he refuse?”

She walked, hot, powdered
pink flowers, swath of color
gifting crushed velvet
tissue, held in hand.
Stroked her nose.

Unexpected dates ascend from
bougainvillea bushes and crape myrtle.
Pound her head, drag her into dappled
shade, silent glade, floral grave.

Now awake, petals coat her tongue
woody pricks carve cheeks
boat motion shakes, flowers float
shadowed blade catches light, splits her throat.

Mother made her,
petaled in lilac, sleeping beast
neck held on, ribboned
Mother grasps glued hands
in repose, bend, kisses away
daughter’s thick lipstick.
Casket closed.
Ready for the final ride.
To be a Quack's Wife—
Mary Butchell’s Corpse

Today,
I think of Martin Van and Mary
Butchell, static art embowered.
Proof invading bodies yields
a halt to death’s erotic claim.
Your body poised at edge of rot,
a first embalmed for earthen tomb.

Poor dear. Bad enough to have a husband ride
a painted pony, hold aloft
the jaw of an ass, cry for crowds.
Your body used to sell his craft,
a calling card for dentistry and,
on the side, a specialization
in piles and anal fistulæ.

Then Mary still resides, in sitting-
room of Martin Van, her embalmed
corpse, waxy, good for business.

At her husband’s beckon, clients flow.
His printed invitation urging strangers
visit “The dear departed” Mary
“between nine and one, Sunday excepted.”

On his second wife’s demand, Mary
Butchell’s camphorated husk went
not underground to rest—no.
But, behind thick glass in museum halls,
a memory not of Mary but of
Martin van. No blessed grave;
she’s lost to Dr.’s quackery.

And there under glass she is espied.
She waits a hundred sixty years
for final rest in glorious flame
the gift of German bombardiers.
A Sometime Interspecies Love Story
-After multiple human to deer transformations in Irish Lore

When I see you hover over me little stag,
feel the softness of your fur,
flanks stroking my thighs wrapped
so tight around, each pore melts, acceptant.

Your spindly arms grasp me to you, surprise
no hoof's scratch in ardent thrust,
I taste clouds of your watercress breath.
My back pendulates roughly, scraping bark from Yew
with each bleating grind.

I delight in your form.
Reach to encompass, two-handed,
the width of your ears,
their stiffness. Oh how you fill me!

The rimless, almost blackness, of your ruminant eyes
see me sanely, a vertical checker-leaved
gleam sparking the white bordered
mad hazel of my Oisin's eyes, prophet-poet of Suibhne,

Mostly you do not know me little deer, but for the brief moment,
when you roll off me, transformed, and I stroke
the familiar patch of hair crowning your right nipple,
in recognition of our union,
the human form you gift me again.

But your smile turns to scream, and you take
flight, spend a long day and a year in trees.

I will wait for your return.
I see the deer:
I see the Dear
-Loose translation inspired by Mary Jane Lamond's performance in the style of Lachlan Dhòmhnail Nill's recording of "Hi Ri Him Bo".

I see it. I see. I see afar the deer
poised at the edge between meadow and gorge.

I see the deer one step from fall,
the draggled men in chase.

The mud spotted hunters with
ribby hounds raise their guns.

Their slender guns in attic chase attack,
climb mountains, slide glens' slopes.

The chase ascends, descends.
Man and deer gutturally grunt "More! More breath!"

The dear in heather bleeds. Drips
bleated breath on purpled petals.

Enheathered hounds gasp for breath,
lap at deer's blood.

Gasping for breath the hounds lick
trembling hunters' finger tips

Hunters' fingers lock 'round pole,
carry heavy deer in moonlight.

Hunters tired from carrying
arrive at Inbhir Nis under Cheshire light.

Under moonish grin the village
feeds. Tonight there is no want.

Inbhir Nis has no want save my want of love.
They raise their voices in lilting song.

Through drink and lilting voiced song
my want in highland tale comes home.

Come to my home in tartan green and orange stripe
news of my dear, my first love, who's been betrothed to another.
A secret culled, called out in kaleidoscopic corpsey quietude.

Wherein a wild query waxes, weighs always,
in a knot no one noticed, not wound
with halted, hurried hands. A humdrum hanging
frozen forever, a feature film floating before her infant, found
near moribund, afore Mom, melting amidst the
scene, swaying sweet arcs in sultry summer.
Our focus: to forget, force from mind, resist affect,
climb, cautioned to cut the cord carefully, to cut
rope, respectfully rend her from rafters, preserve
the tenuous knot tied tenderly and take her out
pinioned. A pretty parcel plastic-wrapped, but rapt
are we, wondering why? What winnowing will would
choose transformation into chaff? Choke in child’s
view and visit this vicissitude ever revolving,
slow-motion circling. She stains our sheets,
red rivulets raining, enrivering creamy thighs. Rosy
blooms in balmy summer bower. Her boy?

Aware, awake, alive.
The Smiths  
*after the 15th c. Middle English Lyric of the same title.*

Sweat smeared smiths, swathed in smoke  
Drive down their darts in dampened dints.  
That tall team twitches, tantalizes  
With muscley mass, mesmeric.  
Arousing ear, attracting the eye to ass and anvil,  
to those hard hammers heavy heaved, hung  
between them two.  
Trembling tendons touched together,  
distill drunken, desirous, dreams  
where many manly mangled palms manacle  
shimmery shanks showered in sluggish  
glittery glow.  

Their gams groped by gangs  
of Smiths whose smatterings slake our sex  
in reddening reveries that rend us of our rest.
A Bright Star

--for Debbie Lopez who taught us all to love Keats and who died too soon at forty-seven

The swan has sung the bright star out.
Her jeweled Gordian shape enpalmed,
kissed by seas, kisses like pricks from pins,
whose oceamed salts embalm her rainbowed air.
And in this salt a prism finds a new beat in her breast
refracts her into other sight

At every end there is a type of sight.
Though her eyes are cloud they are not out,
they brighten the dark paths ahead, calm your breast,
feed your dreams, and tickle your spine in a palm’s
stroke. You try to shake that mournful air,
stopped on tiptoed feet, as if balancing on a pin.

Though you pause in these hours you will not pine
forever. Her colored arc will fill your sight.
Her snaky palace will arise anew, its ceiling domed by air,
by music: flutes of cuirass, adamantine horns. Out-
side the “dryad of the trees” drops a rubied fruit into your palm
and when you bite it, its gushing juice awakens your breast’s

beat. I felt her thunder in my breast,
when she recited “Bright Star.” I was pinned
to my chair as the leaves trembled in her palm.
Her séance bringing Keats back to my sight,
his bulging calves, his brave form without
a single bloody tissued hack. When she read we breathed his air.

But we all only get so much air—
too few “soft fall”’s “and swell”’s of a “ripening breast.”
And when we’re out, we’re out.
And who’s to say when the reaper, a child waving pins,
will burst our floating circus tokens. That child, death, is beyond our sight.
We measure time in our palm’s

line. So hold her voice’s sway in your palm
when autumn’s breeze fingers your hair.
And at your altar, keep her in sight,
joined with ancestors and friends whose breasts,
somewhere, rise and fall defying a pin’s
prick. A candle’s light might be snuffed but it smokily outdures.

Somewhere with clearest sight, a seated Jove, she will extend her palm,
pluck a gentle busy bee from out the air,
and pin it to her breast.
Fruited and Flowered

On this summer day the sky cracks—
opens its airy head. Parenthetic
azure bursts the leaden cap,
the graying gloom that drowned this day
in rain. This blue and gold
pierces the cemetery’s perpetual
gloam.

I stand across the cryptal avenue,
called “Serenity Way.” Serenity
why? Upright in my palm, I hold
a cig whose embral gleam kisses
my paw. Across this avenue, two men lock
step, shuffle sandaled feet, burdened by their
offerings.

One, under oaken trees, stumbly
kneels, his form checkered ghastly
under flaccid leaves swaying in the turgid
breeze. He unfolds his right arm,
as if inspecting a pair of jeans, and plants
lips to each drooping petal. He tulips
grave.

Across “Angels Street” another heavied
man makes his way to the tiny graves chessing
the “Field of Innocence.” His purse thrown
over shoulder yields the sweets and sours of summer.
Oranges, countless limes rolling, a mouth-
twisting game of marbles. He citruses
dead.

The oaken man turns, spits a laugh
says, “You really think he’ll eat that fruit?”
And I shiver. Close my hand on hottened
cherry. I wonder about our namings.
How could Mr. Oak not see slim stones?
See so many dreams pockmarking the yard?
See children?
Leaning over his kin, the fruited man 
looks up, his eyes thin creases in glaring 
sun, the mark of water etching his face a deeper 
shade. He says “And yours will rise? 
Smell those flowers?” Mr. Oak’s face breaks, 
his whitened head shakes, and moves to fruited 
man.

They stand on the border of “Angels 
Street” and “Field of Innocence” 
mid embrace, their grieving shrieks 
through the acres. Their screams shock 
waves, punch holes in my hoary clouds. 
I smile. This is the sound of a 
cemetery.
He had to stop funeral directing cuz he’d cry every day, 
hide his scarlet face behind the hearse not knowing what to say 
to soothe those clans who need an unbroken face, a three-piece-
suit mask of defiance with high-shined Stacy Adams that say, 
“This man—he’s in control of it all.” And he is. Except the tears 
that drip without his call. He can’t decipher what they say. 

He wonders if he’s just tired of the night city’s pulsing breath 
that envelopes him as streets spit corpses who can no longer say 
a damn thing. Does he feel more akin to them, those bodies 
and parts pulled from houses and street? These streets say 

“Never leave your house boy, cuz this is what it’ll get ya’.” 
But he knows that homes have no comfort—have their own say-
ings. Home is where your lover will stab you thirty times, 
where you’ll drown in your own vomit, where no one will hear you say, 
or rather, scream for help. Home is where no one will find 
your body until the Christmas packages pile up and then they’ll say 

they didn’t know you very well, you kept to yourself, stayed 
out of peoples’ business. And one woman remembers, “He’d always say 
‘Good Morning Mrs. Ramsey.’ Such a nice young man. It’s a shame” 
He knows there is nowhere safe, no street, no home, nowhere he can say 

“I won’t be called tonight. Tonight no one will die.” He had to stop. 
But they want him back. Give it another try, Benjamin. What do you say?
Advice to the MA Examinee Seeking the Coveted High Pass; Or, Things to say:

A curtsy is optional but it can do wonders,  
color your fifteen minutes thanking three  
Professors for contributing to your success.

When Milton comes up, (he will) you can show  
off your impressive knowledge of history by asking  
“Did you know he sawed the four legs  
off his piano just to write his masterpiece?”  
Mention that his ear pressed to the dusty floor  
conjures feminist readings. When they ask  
which ones? Say “All and none.”

And if they ask you to bring  
up Herman Melville? This is easy.  
Simply say, “I would prefer not to.”  
If they press, say, “I can’t believe that old  
queen was married. Have you read his work?  
I wish I had Queequeg’s harpoon sticking my back.  
Locked up on a boat with men all spermy.  
I had to take a few breaks if you  
know what I mean.”

Ughhh! And now Beowulf’s blocking  
home plate. You’re almost done.  
“Discuss the transhistorical impact of the Beowulf?”  
“Trans? Well, did you see Grendel’ Mother’s heels?  
Damn you better watch out for that tail.  
How Chicana Lesbian theory can you get!  
Shit girl. Might as well have razorblades in her hair.”

Now all that’s left is to wait the call  
for that high pass you gave your all.